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SIPDIS

NEA/ARP, NEA/I, DRL, OSD-DPMO FOR COL D. ELLIS, J. BASHAM

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SUBJECT: GOI MAKING PROGRESS ON KUWAITI MASS GRAVES

REF: A) KUWAIT 566 B) KUWAIT 587

Classified By: Acting Political Minister-Counselor John G. Fox for Reas
on 1.4 (b).

Summary

¶1. (C) Recently returned from the June 1 Tripartite Commission meeting in Kuwait, the head of Iraq's delegation, Arkan Saleh, reported that the talks were constructive and that Kuwait's lead delegate, Ibrahim Shaheen, had agreed in principle to visit Iraq in the next few months. The issue of Kuwaiti mass graves is receiving heightened political support since a member of the Prime Minister's staff was seconded to the Ministry of Human Rights to oversee humanitarian affairs. Challenges with inter-ministerial coordination have, however, delayed the excavation of non-Kuwaiti mass graves. In particular, support from security services needs to improve before U.S. and international experts can provide technical assistance. Senior GOI officials have assured the Embassy of their resolve to see this issue handled appropriately, as it forms a key component of Iraq's bilateral engagement with Kuwait. End Summary.

Prime Minister's Office Supports MOHR Efforts

¶2. (C) Arkan Saleh, the recently appointed Director-General of Humanitarian Affairs at the Ministry of Human Rights (MOHR), met with Poloffs on June 11 to provide a readout of the June 1 Tripartite Commission (TC) meeting in Kuwait (ref A). Saleh said that real progress was made during the meeting and touted his success at pushing the issue within the GOI. Poloffs praised Saleh's efforts, noting that achieving progress on war missing was an important element in improving Iraq-Kuwait relations. Still technically a member of the Prime Minister's staff, Saleh is currently on seconded to the MOHR. His direct link to Prime Minister Maliki's Chief of Staff, Tareq Abdullah, has allowed Saleh to muster political and financial support for MOHR to move forward on this issue.

¶3. (C) This support was evident in a recent case in which an Iraqi eye-witness, who claims he can identify the site of a key Kuwaiti mass grave near Ramadi, was found in Syria. Abdullah quickly instructed Iraq's Ambassador in Damascus to meet with him. Minister for Human Rights Wijdan Salem and Saleh met personally with another witness on June 9 who claims to know the location of a grave site in Kuwait, but fears his life could be threatened if he travels to Kuwait. These discussions with witnesses, although they have yet to lead to the identification of a mass grave, are what the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) cited as the activity most likely to lead to

successful exhumations (ref B).

MOHR Planning for Kuwaiti Visit

14. (C) At the meeting in Kuwait, the GOI invited the head of Kuwait's delegation, Dr. Ibrahim Shaheen, to visit Baghdad as an initial step leading to a joint GOI-GOK inspection team. Dr. Shaheen indicated that he is very interested in visiting Iraq, he hopes before the end of summer. Both Saleh and Abdullah understand that this initial visit needs to be productive and include visits to mass graves in the south. When asked about the possibility of Iraq hosting a TC meeting, Saleh said hosting a gathering of that stature would be more difficult due to the lack of adequate conference facilities in Baghdad.

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USG Providing Assistance, But Coordination Must Improve

15. (C) Saleh noted the need for more robust inter-ministerial cooperation within the GOI on mass graves. In particular, he said that the Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs and Justice, in addition to local governments, must be involved and cooperate efficiently if sites are to be excavated in a way that conforms to international standards and Iraqi law.

16. (C) The need for better coordination within the GOI became apparent the week of June 8 when an exhumation to be carried out in collaboration a DRL-grantee, the International

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Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), was postponed due to insufficient security support from the Iraqi police. MOHR officials tried to rectify the situation, but was not able to secure the assistance of other ministries despite the intervention of the Prime Minister's staff. The site, located near Basra, does not contain any Kuwaiti remains, but the situation highlights the need for various GOI actors to work in unison for exhumations to be safe, successful, and credible.

17. (C) The Charge raised this incident during his weekly meeting with Tareq Abdullah on June 16. Abdullah replied that he is well aware of the importance of Kuwaiti mass grave excavation, and said he was working to build the MOHR's capacity to handle the task. He expressed appreciation for USG assistance and stated that he sees this technical project as a crucial step to improving bilateral relations with Kuwait. Separately, Emboffs met on June 16 with Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salem to discuss the scuttled excavation and strategize on ways to fix the problem. The Minister stressed that she sees this issue as one of her top priorities and is committed to improving coordination and moving forward with locating new grave sites, in both Iraq and Kuwait.

18. (C) To process exhumed Kuwaiti remains quickly, there need to be more facilities and capacity in Iraq where DNA samples can be tested. The Ministry of Health-administered Medical-Legal Institute (MLI), currently the only facility in Iraq capable of conducting DNA tests, has the capacity to process only two DNA samples per day. This problem is compounded by an Executive decision (NFI) that reportedly bars officials from sending DNA samples out of the country for testing. A DRL-funded program, implemented by the U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation (CRDF), aims to increase the capacity of scientists at Iraqi universities to test DNA samples and link them to the MOHR as part of mass grave training. DRL and Embassy Baghdad are both in contact with CRDF representatives to explore expediting the development of Iraq's capacity to process DNA samples domestically. CJ9 is also exploring ways MNF-I might be able

to assist on the Kuwaiti missing issue, including in the development of DNA-testing capacity.

Comment

19. (C) The GOI is moving in the right direction on mass graves, and with a haste and determination not often exhibited by Iraqi bureaucrats. The direct involvement of the Minister of Human Rights and the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff will help. Coordinating the various GOI players that will need to work in harmony to ensure that exhumations and identification tests are conducted in a secure and credible manner will be the biggest challenge. Emboffs will meet with MOHR officials and ICMP to ensure all sides understand the level of security necessary to adequately secure the grave sites, both to protect MOHR staff and to ensure the integrity of the graves themselves. We will also reach out to the Ministry of Interior, if necessary, to discuss the important role the Iraqi Police must play in future exhumations. End Comment.
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